DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 244 HE 028 356

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TITLE	Faculty (Staff) Development for Improving Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Croatian Experience.
PUB DATE	9 May 95
NOTE	12p.; Light print may not reproduce well.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Faculty; *College Instruction; College Students; *Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; *Higher Education; *Instructional Improvement; School Policy; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role; Universities
IDENTIFIERS	*Croatia; Croats; University of Rijeka (Croatia)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines faculty development at the universities of Croatia, faculty attitudes towards teaching at those institutions, and offers a proposal for increased faculty development. An opening section describes the situation and status of university faculty in Croatia including low salaries, poor equipment, general dissatisfaction, and the pressing need to make faculty aware of their responsibility for quality instruction. The next section looks directly at staff development in Croatia and discusses one survey of teachers and students at the University of Rijeka. This project found that university teachers objected to obligatory staff development and did not believe in pedagogical education as a factor in improving the quality of higher education programs. Students who participated in the survey reported they were generally dissatisfied with the teaching they received. A final section proposes minimal, obligatory faculty development that, though it might draw on foreign models, would be designed to meet Croatia's unique needs. Contains nine references. (JB)

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Dr. Jasminka Ledic

FACULTY (STAFF) DEVELOPMENT FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CROATIAN EXPERIENCE

(summary)

It can be stated that the situation concerning faculty development in Croatia is unsatisfactory. Problems connected with higher education are partly socially caused, but the fact that inefficient teaching results from inadequate pedagogic education is inevitable. Neither one of four Croatian universities offer systematical staff development activity what is partly caused by well-known attitude that being a good scientist is enough to be a good teacher. Such situation is still supported by legislation which demands and evaluates teaching results only formally. At our University we tried to improve the quality of teaching, but well-known problem was found: almost complete lack of interest for the improvement. Nevertheless, our results indicate that teachers are satisfied with their teaching (?), while students were not content with the teaching process. Though it is recognized that obligatory staff development activities are not recommendable, in our opinion at least minimal obligation should be required. This is only one of the reasons for more efficient higher education policy which would - among others - ensure legal and institutional support of staff development. Better financial conditions for younger staff ought to be ensured, in order to stop their emigration.

IR028356

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FACULTY (STAFF) DEVELOPMENT FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CROATIAN EXPERIENCE

BACKGROUND

Relaying on domestic literature and personal experience concerning the problems on university teaching, the statement that university staff development is in our country problem that nobody wants to deal with seriously, can be put. There are many reasons for such an attitude which are entitled for an extended discussion, but the fact is that they lead to low quality of university teaching.

Apart from low salaries of the university teachers, which is a problem typical not only for Croatia, our universities are very badly equipped, so that this fact in all its seriousness presents the problem of the level of competence of graduated students for their future work. It is also typical that the level of equipment of educational institutions becomes lower according to the level of education (meaning that standard equipment in elementary schools is in many cases better than the equipment at universities).

In spite of the new government's willingness to stop the "brain-drain" trend which was big problem in former Yugoslavia, tendency of educated experts to seek work abroad has not stopped. In present situation a university teacher is dissatisfied with his or her status, which is not only materially, but also socially and professionally minimized. The work at the universities despite the existential problems

of younger staff does not offer much possibilities for professional development, because the books, periodicals, and especially the possibility of attending professional meetings - what is very important - are all almost completely out of reach. In such a situation, the quality of teaching at universities becomes a topic hardly worth mentioning. Such situation which concerns especially younger university staff seems even more disappointed and frustrating when one have in mind the fact that universities, as well as public enterprises (like hospitals, administration of justice, public service, etc.) are being supported from budget, with very different range of support for service for equally educated employees, which shows that government treat university people very badly and create such a desperate position. Such situation seems to be very serious in context of searching for quality of higher education: research that are questioning quality of education indicates that the most important factor for a university aspiring to give quality is faculty: for instance, many prestigious universities in United States addressed the importance of faculty as a key factor in achieving a quality education ((Smith, Baxter, 1992).

This situation leads us to the point where we have to make our university teachers be aware of their responsibility, in spite of their desperate situation. In a way it could be done by the summarized discussion during the UNESCO project "Establishment of a European Network on Staff Development in Higher Education" (1987):

"one way by which a higher education institution can face the challenges of the time is by having staff members who

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can knowledgeably assess both the value of tradition and the need for innovation. Teachers hold a strategic position: they are the ones who produce, organize, and transmit knowledge, set "standards of excellence" and direct learning and evaluation. They are institutionally, socially, and professionally responsible for the development of courses and curricula and for the ways by which the minds of students and their qualifications are molded."

Inattention in demanding better quality of the university teaching leads us to the conclusion that these ideas which stress the importance of university teaching are far from pedagogic credo of our higher education policy makers. A situation like this also seems to be supported by a stereotype opinion that a man of science, an expert in his or her field, is automatically also a good teacher, so there is no need for taking special care about teaching performance. The legal aspect of the problem also seems to be built upon this assumption: scientific qualities are absolutely beyond teaching qualities. Although discussion about this problem has never stopped (Gellert, Leitner and Schramm, 1990), it seems that the need for better quality of teaching at universities is widely recognized (Aitkin, 1991). Although I do not suggest that this situation should be converted, I think that educational qualities of university teachers should be more insisted on.

It is rather interesting that only this part of educational system in Croatia remained totally absent of any obligation for obtaining any kind of preparation for teaching:

among other reasons, this is probably the result of another stereotype opinion sustaining that the importance of the methods of teaching diminishes as the population being taught is elder. Following this principle it is considered almost unimportant in which manner knowledge is presented to students. It is accepted among university teachers that student's failure is result of their capabilities, lack of motivation, but in no way as lack of professor's ability to teach.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN CROATIA

Although we have to agree with the fact that staff development as a systematic and continuous activity does not exist in Croatia, it is worth mentioning that individual attempts have taken place. Unfortunately, these attempts have not had proper legislative, institutional and material support. So up to the present moment staff development remains mainly on the level of individual initiative. It is mainly a lone individual who is prepared to put in extra efforts, and such an individual must expect to be frequently exposed to criticism and lack of collaboration from his colleagues. If we accept the general consensus in the literature that the major function of education is to increase individuals' capacity to learn, to provide them with analytic skills, to increase their ability to deal with new information and draw independent conclusions (Gow and Kember, 1990), this brings us to the point in which (high) standards set for the education of students - which, in my opinion, should be the fundamental pre-text of all activities at universities - are not

imperative. They are only achieved as a sacrifice of those who are prepared to invest their own free time for the aim of achieving necessary skills and knowledge to carry this task out. It was even more disappointing for people who care for staff development when the proposal of new law on higher education was recently made, without a word concerning any kind of necessity for staff development.

At the University of Rijeka we tried to gain information from the university teachers themselves about their attitudes towards staff development. The result of this inquiry (Ledic, 1990) showed that teachers, to a large extent, do not feel the need to improve the pedagogical aspect of their work and that they believe to exercise their teaching activity in a satisfactory manner, not indicating too many problems that occur to them while teaching. All in all, the general attitude towards pedagogical improvement expressed by the population we examined was negative. All our subjects expressed a firm opinion against the introduction of an obligatory staff development program, but they do consider it would be useful to introduce some forms of pedagogical improvement which they would be free to choose from. Some very interested facts have come up, like the one indicating the lack of belief in pedagogical education as a factor which could contribute to a higher quality in educational programs at a college, what was in accordance with some studies (Britzman, 1986). This attitude seems to be even more definite when expressed by the teachers of social sciences.

On the other hand, attitudes expressed by the students

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about the quality of teaching offered greatly differ from opinions expressed by the teachers. The students are mostly dissatisfied and they expressed needs for many changes regarding the manner of teaching. Although the attitudes of students towards their teachers should be taken into consideration with some reserve, the fact alone that they are dissatisfied with teaching seemed to be an indicative clue.

The problem of teaching on the university level in Croatia could be also regarded as a very delicate one. Expert services exist which almost exclusively direct their activities towards improving the general level of teaching, but only at lower levels of the educational system (primary and secondary education) where teachers are obliged to have at least minimal pedagogic education. These experts are entitled to enter the classrooms and to advise the teachers. But nobody ever enters a university teacher's classroom and nobody ever interferes. Nobody - apart from students - knows what happens behind the closed doors. What are we left with other than to believe the students?

The neglect of the demand for higher quality of teaching at the university level seems even more serious when connected with the implication on one's teachers belief (defined as a particularly provocative form of personal knowledge that is generally defined as pre- or inservice teachers' implicit assumptions about students, learning, classrooms, and the subject matter to be taught (Kagan, 1992). It is assumed that teachers-to-be probably bring preconceptions and personal beliefs about students and classrooms, which are resistant to change. These beliefs are probably profiled by the hours and

hours spent in classrooms as students, internalizing models of good and poor teaching (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984). However, rather than modifying their starting points, teachers appear to become comfortable with them. Such a process - opposed with the new challenges arisen from the need to adapt universities to new requirements - needs to be radically changed: staff development programs have to challenge the adequacy of university teacher's beliefs.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AT CROATIAN UNIVERSITIES: ONE PROPOSAL

It is considered to be important that every staff development concept should be founded from "below" rather than from "above". Although the authorities on staff development stress that this process cannot be based upon an obligatory concept, my opinion is that at our universities at least a minimum of pedagogical education should be an obligation which the teachers ought to fulfill. The unsatisfactory position of our higher education through a longer period, which is already described before, resulted in a situation in which university teachers do not have a stimulating motive for participating in staff development. This brings us to another difficulty concerning this problem: it is very difficult to transfer experience and rules from those countries where staff development is an already functioning activity (e.g. United States, Great Britain, Germany, etc.). It is necessary to be very cautious when taking over foreign models. Here I am concerned with the possible failure of certain models which cannot be accepted without seriously taking into account the situation of the country into which they are being

transferred. For instance, it is altogether different to expect voluntary participation in a non-competitive environment, ruled by other principles, which is - we all hope - going to change in years to come. Such a change, which would lead us to better quality of teaching at universities should - at least at the beginning of this process - be backed with new legal concept of higher education. For the time being, attending a staff development course may represent a personal sense of achievement and therefore even satisfaction to an individual, but it will not be appreciated in any way. Universities ought to stress demands for better quality of work (in teaching, as well as in research); they have to honor university teachers with high teaching performance as well as to sanction opposite one. However, it is of great importance to illuminate student's sense of importance of quality of teaching: students should be aware of existing situation in which low quality of work (teaching and research) at universities is at the first place their personal loss.

In whatever direction the higher education system is going to develop - and I hope that the government will enable all 4 universities now existing in Croatia to outlive and even develop their differences in greater sense - at least one staff development center (unit, institute, clinic) should be established and developed, because at the moment such an institution does not exist at Croatian universities. Although the better solution should be that each university has such a unit (with it "natural" connection to Faculty of Arts or Teacher's Training College), for the beginning one unit could

care for the needs for all university staff (of course, in a smaller manner). Anyway, I think that we should accept a model of center for staff development as small unit consisting of a few members only who will often be going elsewnere, but would also be bringing other colleagues here. This could be the point for international collaboration, and this seems the right moment for such a concept to take life. Following this idea, we at our university, with the collaboration of University of Berlin, University of Edinburgh and University of London, proposed a joint European project entitled "ESTABLISHMENT OF CENTER FOR STAFF (FACULTY) DEVELOPMENT (csd) FOR THE INNOVATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT UNIVERSITIES" to European Community's TEMPUS program. This project proposal was made upon our experience on this problem, as well as on suggestions from experienced colleagues and relevant literature. It takes account about mentioned problems concerning staff development in Croatia and anticipates participant-orientated teaching, based on careful analyses of participant's needs, as well as individual approach to every participant. We proposed that center's activities should be considered in process of election and re-election of university teachers.

One of the most important factors of successful staff development activity in Croatia is international cooperation. I believe that an international dialogue should contribute to forming a positive attitude for a pedagogic theory which is not entirely subordinate to an ideology (as it often was before, and - in a certain degree, tends to be even these days), and also to make acceptable the need for a personal

development in the field of improvement the quality of teaching at universities, which is in fact conditio sine qua non for good university work.

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